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PROGRAMME, THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Further measures to reduce the risks from a limited number of hazardous chemicals

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report summarizes actions carried out pursuant to Governing Council decision 19/13 B of 7 February 1997, by the secretariat, Governments and relevant organizations and entities, including those carried out in the context of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) and the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC).

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to note with appreciation the actions for reducing the risks from a limited number of hazardous chemicals carried out by the secretariat, Governments and relevant organizations and entities pursuant to its decision 19/13 B, in particular the actions carried out in the context of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety and the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Governing Council, in its decision 19/13 B of 7 February 1997, welcomed and endorsed the recommendations contained in the report of the Government-designated Group of Experts on Further Measures to Reduce the

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Risks from a Limited Number of Hazardous Chemicals (UNEP/PIC/EG/1/3) concerning:

(a) Unwanted stocks of pesticides and other chemicals;

(b) Capacity-building; and

(c) Inadequate information.

The Council also noted the Group's recommendations concerning issues related to risk reduction from a limited number of hazardous chemicals, including possible bans or phase-outs.

In the same decision, the Council also invited Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, as addressees of specific recommendations, to review the report of the Group of Experts and its annexes and consider taking action, as appropriate, to implement them and to report on such action to the Governing Council at its twentieth session.

2. In September 1998, the secretariat invited the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) and the participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) to submit a short report on actions taken in response to this decision, with the aim of presenting to the Governing Council a compilation of those actions. The participating organizations of IOMC are UNEP, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

II. INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON CHEMICAL SAFETY

3. The second session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety was held in Ottawa from 10 to 14 February 1997. The agenda included the areas addressed in the report of the Group of Experts on Further Measures: unwanted stocks of pesticides and other chemicals; capacity-building; inadequate information, and chemicals of international concern other than persistent organic pollutants. The relevant action items and recommendations agreed on by the Forum elaborated on ways in which work in the areas could be carried forward. 1/ The third meeting of the Inter-sessional Group of the Forum was held at Yokohama, Japan, from 1 to 4 December 1998. The agenda was developed taking into consideration the outcome and recommendations of the second session of IFCS and included three thematic sessions, on international

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1/ The final report of the second session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety has been circulated as document IFCS/FORUM-II/97.25w.

assessment of chemical risks, obsolete chemicals and pesticides, and innovative approaches and partnerships to strengthening national capabilities and capacities. 2/

4. The following sections provide specific information on some of the work and efforts of IFCS relevant to the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Further Measures.

A. Unwanted stocks of pesticides and other chemicals

5. A thematic session on obsolete chemicals and pesticides at the third meeting of the Inter-sessional Group focused on identifying those areas where progress can be made and filling the gaps, to the extent possible, in what is already known and done. The intention was to provide clear recommendations to Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations on what should be done to optimize responses to the problem of obsolete chemicals and pesticides, clearly delineate roles and responsibilities in clean-up and prevention, obtain commitments to fulfil those roles and develop strategies to give effect to that commitment. In response to the request made by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for an International Legally Binding Instrument for Implementing International Action on Certain Persistent Organic Pollutants at its first meeting, the problem of polychorinated biphenyls (PCBs) received particular attention.

B. Capacity-building

6. Priority issues for national capacity building have been identified by countries participating in the IFCS efforts and in particular through the process of developing national profiles and action plans on the management of chemicals. At its third meeting, the Inter-sessional Group discussed the substantive priority issues with a view toward developing strategies to facilitate a more systematic targeting of capacity-building activities toward country-defined activities and considered various ways to encourage and support innovative partnerships among recipients and donors.

C. Inadequate information

7. At its second session, IFCS discussed the information requirements of developing countries and countries with economies in transition and made a number of recommendations to all groups of IFCS participants on how information exchange could be improved. The Forum emphasized the need for national governments to institute national co-ordinating mechanisms for information exchange and identify the types of information needed, and stressed the need to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of information exchange. The Forum will continue to monitor and encourage progress in establishing Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs); a progress report was prepared for the third meeting of the Inter-sessional Group by the newly formed IOMC Co-ordinating Group on PRTRs.

2/ For further information on the work of the thematic sessions, see the final report of the third meeting of the Inter-sessional Group (IFCS/ISG3/98.50w), Meeting Summary, paras. 15-63.

D. Chemicals of international concern other than POPs

8. At its second session, the Forum considered the topic of chemicals of international concern other than POPs and noted that several countries expressed interest in working together in an open and transparent process with others (i.e., Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to review chemical problems that pose significant health or environmental risks that are not being addressed under ongoing initiatives. Informal discussions among a number of IFCS participants have taken place on the timing, venue and organization of a possible workshop. A number of projects have just started nationally and regionally to develop criteria to identify chemicals that create harm to the environment or to human health. In addition, the work on developing criteria for identifying POPs and the type of chemicals falling under the scope of the forthcoming UNEP convention on POPs will determine the chemicals of international concern that will be left unattended. A status report to the Inter-sessional Group included a proposal to arrange a workshop on chemicals of international concern other than POPs when outputs are available from the current work in developing criteria. It is anticipated this workshop would be held in the beginning of year 2000.

III. INFORMATION PROVIDED BY PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS OF THE INTER-ORGANIZATION PROGRAMME FOR THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS (IOMC)

A. Unwanted stocks of pesticides and other chemicals

9. The issue of obsolete chemicals stocks is seen as a major concern by countries. Inter-secretariat meetings on unwanted pesticides and other chemicals were convened in June 1997 by FAO and in July 1998 by UNEP. As a follow-up, FAO, the Secretariat of the Basel Convention, UNIDO and UNEP agreed to initiate a collaborative project to address the problem of obsolete chemicals in a more comprehensive manner and have agreed to join forces to develop national inventories of obsolete stocks of chemicals, to address the needs for guidance documents for the identification and the disposal of certain toxic substances, to develop site remediation and disposal programmes as well as a capacity-building programme. To support this effort, the IOMC organizations, in particular FAO, co-sponsored the organization of the above-mentioned thematic session on the management of obsolete chemicals and pesticides at the third meeting of the Inter-sessional Group in order to discuss the plan of action, inform countries of the planned projects and identify potential partners. The session's agenda included the specific items noted in the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Further Measures.

10. FAO executes a project funded by the Government of the Netherlands on prevention and disposal of unwanted pesticide stocks in Africa and the Near East. The first pilot phase, which started in July 1994, intended to prevent further unnecessary accumulation of obsolete pesticide stocks and provided the framework for an action plan for the containment and disposal of such stocks based on multi-donor participation. This pilot phase financed the disposal of 262 tons of obsolete pesticides from Yemen, 360 tons from Zambia

and 12 tons from the Seychelles. At present 14 countries have completed disposal operations, assisted by various donors, covering a total of 2,667 tons, including the 634 tons disposed of by phase I.

11. Phase II started in October 1996 and focuses on provision of assistance in the acquisition of funds, compliance with international safety and environmental standards by contractors of disposal operations, review of new disposal methods, investigation of solutions for pesticide-contaminated soils and training on pesticide-stock planning and storage management. A reliable database with inventories of obsolete pesticides of 45 countries in Africa and the Near East has been established and is regularly updated. Useful technical guidelines and posters (prepared jointly with WHO and UNEP) were prepared and distributed widely. Collaboration with international agencies and non-governmental organizations proved very useful, and negotiations with industry on meeting part of the disposal costs are ongoing.

12. FAO, with support from UNEP, the United States of America and Canada has also started activities to elaborate inventories of obsolete pesticides in Latin America.

B. Capacity-building

13. Giving capacity-building a high priority, the IOMC organizations commissioned an in-depth written review and analysis of the capacity building activities of the organizations supporting the six programme areas of chapter 19 of Agenda 21. The report includes a number of recommendations on how coordination and cooperative aspects of capacity-building work could be enhanced. A special internal workshop was convened to review the report, assess past and current practices of the IOMC organizations and explore new ways and approaches for improved cooperation with the various stakeholders in capacity building. A paper presenting a number of issues arising from the discussions was prepared as a contribution to the special session on capacity-building at the third meeting of the Inter-sessional Group, which the IOMC organizations are co-sponsoring.

14. To help countries prepare for the intergovernmental negotiations on persistent organic pollutants (POPs), UNEP convened eight subregional/regional awareness-raising workshops on POPs between July 1997 and June 1998. The proceedings were published in English and other United Nations languages relevant to the specific region. Two other workshops on chemical-risk assessment were also organized by UNEP, the reports of which have been published, and 12 subregional and national workshops on chemicals management, chemical information, new industrial chemicals, PRTRs, etc. were organized/co-sponsored. A new series of workshops on POPs management will be initiated in the beginning of 1999. UNEP also has a major project in place with the Russian Federation to build the capacities of countries members of the Commonwealth of Independent States to manage chemicals safely.

15. FAO continued to execute projects to establish and improve all aspects of pesticide management. This was done within the framework of the International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and use of Pesticides. Some of the projects are funded by the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme and are of relatively short term (one to two years, to establish for example, legislation, regulations, laboratory facilities, etc.). Also, a project

funded by the Government of the Netherlands covering Sahelian countries started with the objective of improving all aspects of pesticide management. It should be borne in mind that FAO also executes very substantial projects to promote the implementation of integrated pest management at farm level, thus reducing pesticide use and exposure.

16. In March, 1996, the Inter-sessional Group of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, invited OECD to develop an information-exchange programme to facilitate coordination of capacity-building assistance provided by OECD member countries to developing countries in the field of chemicals/pesticides management. This project would complement activities conducted through IOMC to coordinate capacity-building activities of multilateral organizations. In response, OECD conducted a first survey of development assistance activities for capacity-building. The survey compiled information on donor country development assistance activities, including donor country/recipient country identification, type of activity and the duration of each activity. The results from this survey were made available at the second session of IFCS in February, 1997. In February 1998, a second survey was conducted. As of 15 June, 1998, 17 OECD Member countries and the European Commission described 230 projects, among which, 114 new ones were reported in 1998. The results from this survey were made available to the Inter-sessional Working Group at its third meeting. All of this information will be made available on the Internet.

17. Transfer of technology and international investment related to installations in non-OECD countries are addressed in the OECD Guiding Principles for Chemical Accident Prevention, Preparedness and Response, which were published in 1992. A process to review and update these Guiding Principles is under way. This will include a review and possible update of the section on international investments. UNEP has published a "supplementary text" to the OECD Guiding Principles, focusing on the roles and responsibilities of public authorities and industry in recipient countries of investments and technology. OECD will work closely with UNEP in undertaking the above review and update.

18. At the country level, following the IFCS recommendation in 1994, more than 55 developing countries and countries with economies in transition have embarked on, or completed, the preparation of a national profile to assess their existing national infrastructure for the sound management of chemicals, including the identification of gaps, weaknesses and priorities for follow-up. These comprehensive assessments have been prepared through multisectoral teams which typically comprised representatives from more than 10 ministries and non-governmental organizations as recommended in the UNITAR/IOMC National Profile Guidance Document. In many countries, the national profile has been endorsed as a national reference document which serves both as a valuable source of information and as a starting point for coordinated capacity-building activities at the national as well as international level.

19. Other relevant activities of IOMC organizations are: Implementing ILO Conventions Nos. 170 and 174; implementation of the Code of Conduct: field programme on pesticide management; implementation of the WHO Guidelines for Drinking-Water Quality; and the UNITAR/UNEP/FAO London Guidelines/PIC training programme.

20. A summary listing of existing materials related to chemicals management legislation, including guidance and reference documents that address general and specific aspects of chemicals management legislation/regulation as well as guidelines which have been prepared in the context of specific international agreements, was compiled for the third meeting of the Inter-sessional Group.

C. Inadequate information

21. In response to the recommendations of the Government-designated Group of Experts on Further Measures and to decision 19/13 B, UNEP has developed its activities to promote chemicals information exchange. This was achieved through distribution of the IRPTC database (diskette version), various publications of technical documents and the steering of the coordinating group for chemicals information exchange, which includes all IOMC organizations. In addition, as a part of the actions to prepare for and support the POPs negotiations, UNEP organized regional awareness-raising workshops which provided a forum for information exchange on POPs problems and pesticides management. Eight proceedings containing information from the countries of the regions have been produced.

22. In February 1996, the OECD Council adopted a recommendation calling on member countries to take steps to establish PRTR systems using as a basis the principles and information set forth in the OECD Guidance Manual for Governments. A report will be developed in 1999 to review the actions taken by member countries and analyse the differences between the various systems. OECD, UNEP and UNITAR have worked closely over the last few years to prepare policy guidance materials and supported the efforts of countries intending to develop a PRTR. In September, OECD held an international conference on PRTRs, hosted by the Environment Agency of Japan and held in cooperation with UNEP and UNITAR. Representatives from government, industry, non-governmental and international organizations from 34 countries attended. The conference was designed to assess how PRTRs have been used to identify and address environmental problems and to recommend future directions and activities on the design, use, and implementation of PRTRs world-wide. A series of recommendations were made which will be implemented by countries, OECD, UNEP and UNITAR over the next few years.

23. Under the oversight of IOMC, OECD is the focal point for work on the development of harmonized classification system for human health and environmental hazards. An Advisory Group on Harmonization of Classification and Labelling was formally established in 1995. The objective of the Advisory Group was to reach consensus on harmonized classification systems for human health and environment endpoints for which there are existing systems and to coordinate the work. The Advisory Group has reached consensus on eight classification systems such as acute toxicity, skin and eye irritation, carcinogenicity and germ cell mutagenicity, reproductive toxicity, hazards to the environment, etc. The results of the work will be forwarded to the IOMC Coordinating Group on the Harmonization of Chemical Classification Systems with a view to furthering the agreement in the United Nations system in order to develop a globally harmonized system.

24. In addition, report on chemical information exchange activities was prepared and submitted to the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety at its second session (IFCS/FORUM-II/97.13w Rev.1).